



**Department of  
Veterans Affairs**

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# Fact Sheet

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## VA Benefits for Former Prisoners Of War

Former American POWs are eligible for special veterans benefits, including enrollment in VA medical care for treatment in VA hospitals and clinics without copayments as well as disability compensation for select injuries and diseases that have been generally associated with internment. These benefits are in addition to regular veterans benefits and services to which they, as veterans, are entitled.

Of the 125,214 Americans surviving captivity, about 32,550 were estimated to be alive as of the end of 2004. Records show that 142,246 Americans were captured and interned during World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the Somalia and Kosovo conflicts, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. There were no servicemembers reported missing in action from the Bosnia deployment nor from recent Afghanistan operations.

### American Prisoners Of War as of January 2005

	<b>Captured and Interned</b>	<b>Died While POW</b>	<b>Returned to U.S. Military Control</b>	<b>Refused to Return</b>	<b>Alive at end of 2004</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>142,246</b>	<b>17,009</b>	<b>125,214</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>32,550</b>
WW I	4,120	147	3,973	--	--
WW II	130,201	14,072	116,129	--	29,850
Korean	7,140	2,701	4,418	21	2,100
Vietnam	725	64	661	--	587
Gulf War	47	25	21	--	21
Somalia	1	--	1	--	1
Kosovo	3	--	3	--	3
Iraq	9	--	8	--	8

Notes: A more detailed analysis is at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/DOCS/POW4-06-05.doc>.

The Iraq column includes one servicemember who continues to be listed as "missing/captured" and while not counted in the column of living former POWs, this is not meant to imply anything about his vital status. One Gulf War servicemember is listed as missing-captured after his status was changed. The estimate of the number alive from World War II and the Korean War at the end of 2004 is based on mortality estimates from VA's Office of the Actuary that are rounded to the nearest 50. This report assumes all returned POWs of the Gulf War, Somalia and Kosovo are still alive, but the government has not individually tracked their vital status. Because of the advanced age of World War I veterans, estimates of those alive would be too unreliable to report.

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## **Former POWs 2/2/22**

Congress has defined a prisoner of war as a person who, while serving on active duty, was forcibly detained by an enemy government or a hostile force, during a period of war or in situations comparable to war.

With nine out of ten former POWs having served in World War II, the estimated number of living POWs decreased from nearly 36,000 to 32,500 during 2004 due mainly to the estimated death rates for World War II and Korean POWs.

### **Compensation**

As of March 2005, there were 19,234 former POWs receiving compensation benefits from VA. Nearly 14,000 of them are rated as totally disabled.

Studies have shown that the physical hardships and psychological stress endured by POWs have life-long effects on health and on social and vocational adjustment. These studies also indicate increased vulnerability to psychological stress. The laws on former POW benefits recognize that military medical records do not cover periods of captivity. For many diseases, unless there is evidence of some other cause, VA disability compensation can be paid on the basis of a presumption that a disease present today is associated with the veteran's captivity or internment.

For POWs detained for 30 days or more, such eligibility covers any of the following illnesses that are found at a compensable level (at least 10 percent disabling): avitaminosis; beriberi; chronic dysentery; cirrhosis of the liver; helminthiasis; irritable bowel syndrome and malnutrition, including associated optic atrophy. Also covered are: pellagra and any other nutritional deficiency; peptic ulcer disease; and peripheral neuropathy, except where directly related to infectious causes. Several categories of diseases are presumptively associated with captivity without any 30-day limit: psychosis; any anxiety state; dysthymic disorders; cold injury; post-traumatic arthritis; strokes; and common heart diseases.

The base rate of VA monthly compensation, according to degree of disability, ranges from \$108 to \$2,299 per month. Veterans rated as 30 percent or more disabled qualify for additional benefits based upon the number of dependents. Dependents of those rated 100 percent disabled may qualify for educational assistance.

Spouses of those veterans who die as a result of service-connected disabilities are eligible for dependency and indemnity compensation. Spouses of former POWs who were rated 100 percent disabled and who died of a condition unrelated to their service also may be eligible, depending on the date of death and how long the veteran held the 100 percent disability rating. Those non-service-connected deaths prior to October 1999 are covered if the former POW had been 100 percent disabled for at least 10 years. More recent non-service-connected deaths are covered under a law that provides the benefit when the former POWs was 100 percent disabled for a year or more.

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## **Former POWs 3/3/3/3**

### **Medical Care**

Former POWs receive special priority for VA health-care enrollment, even if their illness has not been formally associated with their service. Former POWs are exempt from making means test copayments for inpatient and outpatient medical care and medications, but they have the same copay rules as other veterans for extended care. They also are now eligible for dental care without any length-of-interment requirement.

VA periodically has provided training for its medical staff about the issues of former POWs, and an online curriculum is maintained at <http://www.va.gov/VHI/page.cfm?pg=9>.

### **Outreach Campaign**

In collaboration with its Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War, VA launched a campaign in 2003 to ensure that eligible former POWs are aware of their VA benefits. Direct mail was used where addresses could be found for these veterans who were not currently on the rolls. For those already receiving benefits, they were reminded of the possible availability of increased compensation if a condition has worsened and they also were alerted to the improvement of benefits in recent years. In addition, to seek former POWs for whom VA could not locate an address, or to reach widows of veterans who may have died of a service-connected condition, VA issued news releases and provided interviews to alert the public to expanded presumptive service-connection policies. Brochures, exhibits and VA Web sites were improved to provide more information to former POWs and the public.

By early 2004, there had been 356 veterans added to the rolls, former POWs who had not previously been drawing financial benefits to which they were entitled, and the number receiving higher ratings as totally disabled was up by more than 1,000. Later in 2004, VA began another outreach campaign to locate former POWs who were experiencing two new presumptive conditions – heart disease or stroke – to alert them to the change in law.

### **Additional Resources**

POW coordinators are assigned to each VA regional office and medical center and are available to provide more information. Former POWs may contact VA regional offices with general benefits questions at 800-827-1000. Callers are automatically connected to the nearest VA regional office. Medical eligibility questions may be directed to 877-222-8387.

Additional information for former POWs also is available from VA's Web site at

<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/>.

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